

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 DOE-11

SOE-02 MCT-01 SNM-05 AID-05 IO-13 /129 W

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R 230525Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2501

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY SUVA

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CANBERRA 1360

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OCON, AS

SUBJECT: COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT REGIONAL MEETING -
FEBRUARY 13-16, 1978

REF: CANBERRA 1037 (DTG: 100649Z FEB 78)

1. SUMMARY: THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT REGIONAL MEETING HELD IN SYDNEY FEBRUARY 13-16 ENDED SATISFACTORILY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND PROBABLY FOR MOST OF THE OTHER NATIONS IN ATTENDANCE. THE CONFERENCE AGREED TO FORM CONSULTATIVE OR WORKING GROUPS ON TRADE, ENERGY, TERRORISM AND ILLICIT DRUGS. THE GOA ALSO ANNOUNCED A CHANGED POLICY ON THE COMMON FUND WHICH WAS WELL RECEIVED. INDIA WILL HOST THE NEXT REGIONAL CONFERENCE
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IN NEW DELHI IN 1980. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 12, PRIOR TO THE OPENING OF THE REGIONAL MEETING, PRIME MINISTER FRASER NOTED "IT WOULD BE WRONG IF ANYONE EXPECTED GREAT AND DRAMATIC RESULTS FROM THIS CONFERENCE." FRASER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT NO SINGLE MEETING COULD SOLVE MAJOR PROBLEMS, BUT EXPRESSED HIS DETERMINATION TO

USE THE RESOURCES OF THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION TO FURTHER THE GOALS OF COMMONWEALTH MEMBERS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC. AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE CONGERENCE, PM FRASER AND FONMIN PEACOCK EXPRESSED SATISDACTION WITH THE RESULTS OBTAINED AND EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT OTHER PARTICIPATING NATIONS WERE SATISFIED AS WELL.

3. THE CONFERENCE BEGAN WITH WIDE RANGING ADDRESSES FROM ALL THE HEADS OF STATE ON WORLD AND REGIONAL POLITICAL TRENDS. POLITICAL DISCUSSION CENTERED ON THE ASIA-PACIFIC AREA AND TOUCHED ON PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND CONTINUING DISARMAMENT EFFORTS.

4. SPECIFICALLY, THE CONFEREES AGREED:

(1) TO SET UP A CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON TRADE (TO BE CHAIRED BY AUSTRALIA) "TO EXAMINE MEASURES TO FACILITATE TRAVEL WITHIN THE REGION, TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS AND REDUCE THE COST OF INTRA-REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION OF GOODS, AND TO SIMPLIFY PROCEDURES FOR INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE TO REDUCE NON-TARIFF BARRIERS AND FACILITATE TRADE."

(2) TO SET UP A CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON ENERGY (TO BE CHAIRED BY INDIA) "TO DEVELOP AND DIFFUSE APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY ON THE USE OF ALTERNATE SOURCES OF ENERGY SUCH AS SOLAR ENERGY, BIOGAS AND WIND POWER."
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(3) TO SET UP A WORKING GROUP ON TERRORISM (CHAIRED BY SINGAPORE) "TO EXPLORE WAYS TO ENLARGE COLLABORATION IN COMBATTING TERRORISM." (ALTHOUGH NOT ON THE ORIGINAL AGENDA, TERRORISM BECAME AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOLLOWING A BOMB BLAST OUTSIDE THE HILTON HOTEL, WHICH KILLED TWO PEOPLE AND SERIOUSLY WOUNDED FIVE OTHERS, EARLY IN THE MORNING OF THE OPENING DAY OF THE CONFERENCE. AFTER THE CONFERENCE, MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN CANCELLED A PRIVATE VISIT TO MELBOURNE FOLLOWING TERRORIST THREATS TO KIDNAP HIM.)

(4) TO SET UP A WORKING GROUP ON ILLICIT DRUGS (CHAIRED BY MALAYSIA) "TO SUPPRESS THE TRAFFIC...AND TO COOPERATE WITH EACH OTHER ON THESE MATTERS RECOGNIZING THAT THE WORK OF INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES FORMED THE BASIS FOR SUCH REGIONAL COOPERATION."

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5. THE CONFEREES ALSO AGREED ON THE NEED TO DEVELOP PROGRAMS TO ASSIST SMALL STATES AND AGREED TO NAME A CONSULTANT (TO BE PROVIDED BY THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT) TO BE BASED IN FIJI IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC BUREAU FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION, WHOSE DUTIES WOULD INCLUDE THE COORDINATION OF FOLLOW-UP ACTION FOR THE ABOVE FOUR CONSULTATIVE AND WORKING GROUPS. (THE GOA HAS AGREED TO FINANCE THIS CONSULTANT'S ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS.) THE NATIONS ALSO AGREED TO MEET AGAIN IN NEW DELHI IN 1980. THE PARTICIPATING NATIONS AGREED THAT THE SYDNEY MEETING SHOULD NOT LEAD TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ANY NEW PERMANENT GROUPING WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH NOR SHOULD IT FRAGMENT THE COMMONWEALTH. MOREOVER, IT WOULD NOT COMPETE WITH ASEAN, THE SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION, OR OTHER EXISTING ORGANIZATIONS. IT WOULD REMAIN A LOOSE, INFORMAL, CONSULTATIVE ORGANIZATION WITH NO
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PERMANENT STAFF.

6. THE DEVELOPING NATIONS ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE WERE PLEASED BY AUSTRALIA'S TURN-AROUND ON THE COMMON FUND. THE GOA AGREED THAT "CONTINUING INSTABILITY IN COMMODITY PRICES GENERALLY AND

THE RECENT SHARP DECLINE IN THE PRICES OF SOME COMMODITIES WERE ADVERSELY AFFECTING DEVELOPMENT IN ALL PRODUCING COUNTRIES AND AGGRAVATING THE ALREADY SERIOUS BALANCE OF PAYMENTS AND DEBT SERVICING PROBLEM OF MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES." FRASER ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT IT WAS NOW AUSTRALIA'S POSITION THAT A COMMON FUND SHOULD BE FUNDED NOT ONLY BY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS BUT ALSO BY DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS FROM GOVERNMENTS. FRASER ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT IT WAS NOW AUSTRALIA'S POSITION THAT IT WOULD BE PROPER FOR THE COMMON FUND TO PAY FOR OTHER MEASURES INVOLVED IN THE TRANSPORT AND DISTRIBUTION OF COMMODITIES.

7. THE GOA WAS GRATEFUL THAT THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES REPRESENTED DID NOT ATTACK AUSTRALIA'S HIGHLY PROTECTED ECONOMY. FRASER DID WHAT HE COULD TO DEFUSE THIS ISSUE BY CLAIMING THAT AUSTRALIA'S IMPORTS OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WERE SLIGHTLY HIGHER PER CAPITA THAN U.S. IMPORTS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, ALMOST DOUBLE EEC IMPORTS, AND ALMOST THREE TIMES AS HIGH AS JAPAN'S. HE SUGGESTED THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE EVEN MORE IMPORTS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IF AND WHEN THE EEC, THE U.S. AND JAPAN LESSENED THEIR BARRIERS AGAINST AUSTRALIA. DFA SOURCES CLAIMED THAT HUSSEIN ONN ACKNOWLEDGED AUSTRALIA'S EMPLOYMENT AND TRADE DIFFICULTIES AND RESULTANT NEED FOR PROTECTIONIST MEASURES, AND THAT EVEN SINGAPORE'S PRIME MINISTER LEE AVOIDED HIS USUAL HEAVY ATTACKS ON AUSTRALIAN PROTECTIONISM.

8. DFA SOURCES ADMITTED THAT INITIALLY THERE WAS SOME
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RELUCTANCE TO INVITE INDIA TO ATTEND THE CONFERENCE BECAUSE OF THE SHEER SIZE OF THAT COUNTRY. HOWEVER, PRESIDENT DESAI HAD PROBABLY BEEN THE MOST EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTOR TO THE CONFERENCE AND THE AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE THAT INDIA ESPECIALLY WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE ITS PRESENCE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC AREA. THE GOA ALSO WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE ITS ADMITTEDLY WEAK CONTACTS WITH INDIA. GOA OFFICIALS WERE ESPECIALLY GRATIFIED THAT PRESIDENT DESAI OFFERED TO HOST THE NEXT CONFERENCE IN 1980, BECAUSE THERE WAS REAL DOUBT THAT THERE WOULD BE A FOLLOW-UP MEETING.

9. IN SUM, ALTHOUGH CONCRETE RESULTS WERE FEW, THE GOA WAS PLEASED WITH THE ADMITTEDLY LIMITED RESULTS OF THE CONFERENCE, PLEASED THAT IT PUT AUSTRALIA IN THE LIMELIGHT, AND HOPEFUL THAT IT WILL LEAD TO GREATER REGIONAL COOPERATION AND BETTER USE OF THE COMMONWEALTH ORGANIZATION.

10. THE CONFERENCE COMMUNIQUE WILL BE FORWARDED TO ADDRESSEE POSTS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978CANBER01360
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780083-0777
Format: TEL
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780224/aaaaatuy.tel
Line Count: 224
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c76a9ed1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 CANBERRA 1037
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3510338
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT REGIONAL MEETING - FEBRUARY 13-16, 1978
TAGS: OCON, AS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c76a9ed1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014